

# Crossroads Arts Center a meeting place of art and ideas

By Tessa Sandstrom

It starts over a cup of coffee. Friends gather in coffeehouses, usually just for small talk, but it isn't long before ideas are shared and influence is spread. It happened in coffeehouses in 18th Century France and roused the French Enlightenment. It happened again when literary greats like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac met in New York cafes and inspired the Beat Generation. Then, in 2005, it happened again – this time, in Hettinger, North Dakota.

What likely began as five friends merely meeting for a cup of coffee on Christmas Eve morning quickly turned into an idea. This idea, they hoped, would not only transform two abandoned buildings on Main Street into an art center for the community, but might even inspire others in the region and state to take hold of a new kind of movement for these open plains. Now, sitting over another cup of coffee, this time in their brainchild's cafe, these five friends can be happy about the progress this idea has made.

In just four months, these five found-

ers, which quickly grew to 26 volunteers, helped transform an abandoned bowling alley, cafe and photography studio on Hettinger's Main Street into the Crossroads Arts Center. The center was created with the purpose to not only display, promote and sell local artists' works, but to also give others the opportunity to learn to create their own. And, in the nearly two years since the concept of Crossroads was first brewed up over a cup of coffee, the center has continued to grow and offer more arts opportunities to do just that.

"The center has provided a distinctive and appealing environment where residents and travelers can gather for coffee and conversation throughout the day," says Lynn Luckow, a Hettinger expatriate now living in San Francisco and one of the five who sat down to coffee that day.

"In addition, high school youth can congregate there when classes are finished, artists in the community and region can showcase their works and people of all ages can gather with a different purpose in mind—to enjoy art and a variety of forms of human creativity."

The center features artists in and near Hettinger, as well as some from across the state, Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming. In addition, the center welcomes all forms of art, from paintings, sketches, pottery and photography to music, woodcarvings, jewelry, poems and books, dancing and storytelling. "The original group wanted a place for art of all avenues," says Rita Becker, who was among those who pooled their own money, time and resources to build the center from the ground up. And, the variety of offerings shows they've accomplished in providing that.

Among the many artists who display their art in the Center is Marsha Lehmann of Bowman, a regionally-renowned oil painter. She has recently been chosen to participate in the Greenwich Workshop Gallery SmallWorks North America, which seeks to exhibit, sell and publish the best work from the finest artists working today. This is a big honor for the local artist who also has galleries in Sheyenne and Cody, Wyoming, and Dickinson and Bowman, but Lehmann is also supportive and excited about centers like the Cross-



On this page are two of Duey Marthaller's wood-turned pieces.



roads Arts Center that work to make art available to local citizens and to promote all local artists. “To have an original gallery that carries original paintings is very positive for southwest North Dakota,” says Lehmann. “We can’t have enough of that. It’s just been good regionally.”

Like many artists throughout the region, much of Lehman’s work is inspired from the area’s landscapes and western culture. Other artists, however, are not only inspired by North Dakota’s natural surroundings, but use many of its resources to create works of art. This is true about Duey Marthaller, a wood turner from Mandan. Marthaller uses many North Dakota woods in creating most of his pieces, which include bowls, decorative boxes and intricate ornaments through the art of woodturning, a form of woodworking that uses a lathe to turn the wood while a hand tool is used to shape it. According to Marthaller, many people are not only surprised to find woodturners in North Dakota, but are as equally surprised at many of the beautiful woods native to North Dakota. “I use a lot of wood from North Dakota, including boxelder, Russian olive, plum, chokecherry, elm, oak, walnut, birch and Badlands Cedar. A lot of artists who use woods that are grown here are surprised at how beautiful North Dakota woods really are.”

Marthaller also sells some of his work at Heritage Arts in Michigan, North Dakota, from his home, and at Pride of Dakota events. The Hettinger native became involved in Crossroads when someone contacted him about displaying his art there. “It’s been a great thing for me. The Center is an excellent avenue where people can just walk in not particularly looking for anything, but will see all different kinds of art. This is good for a small town. There are many people in these areas who are interested in art, but don’t have a lot of opportunities to experience or purchase it.”

Sheila Novak of Mott is another artist who has been involved in and displays her crafts at the center. Novak weaves reed baskets, a trade she learned 25 years ago in Indiana. Since she returned to North Dakota, Crossroads has become an important venue for her to share her art. Her

products are popular among many of the locals, but Novak finds that many passersby are surprised to see the art form in the North Dakota plains. “There are a lot of people who are passing through Hettinger and stop and look,” she says. “I’ve



**Women of the Prairie, by Marsha Lehmann of Bowman.**

had a lot of compliments from people who didn’t realize that there was a weaver in this part of the country.” But, thanks to Novak’s dedication to sharing her art, visitors could expect to see many more weavers from around the region.

Novak is just one of the many artists who help teach regular classes at

the Center in its mission to promote art and spread an appreciation for it. These classes have included everything from oil painting and basket weaving to French, music and even belly dancing lessons. Larry Woiwode, an area author and North Dakota’s Poet Laureate, also came to the center to teach a class in writing memoirs. This winter, Marthaller will join the ranks of artist-teachers who hold classes at Crossroads.

“We’re trying to offer something that isn’t seen in other places and that some people wouldn’t have the opportunity to do otherwise,” says Becker, who says these classes are attended by people from throughout the southwest region. “These classes give us a chance to find out if an art form is something we’d like to do. We just like to keep testing the water. And, it’s an opportunity to do something else and meet some people we might never have met.”

Apart from displaying art and holding classes, Crossroads strives to offer its visitors chances to experience more exotic cuisine as well. They hold special dinners to help raise money for the center, which will feature foods many might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. Past events have included a Thai dinner, a Crab feed and a Spanish night that featured Paella. The dinners also provide local poets and musicians the opportunity to provide entertainment to packed room.

But, perhaps most important, the Crossroads Arts Center offers all members of the community a place to come in and enjoy the art, order a beverage from the coffee shop and just sit and visit. After all, it is over a cup of coffee that some of the best ideas are made. The five friends who sat down with a cup of coffee on a Christmas Eve morning can attest to that.

For more information about the Crossroads Arts Center, or to view and purchase art from Crossroads online, visit [www.crossroadsartscenter.org](http://www.crossroadsartscenter.org).

The Crossroads Arts Center received funding through the NDCA in support of a Larry Woiwode writing workshop. The Hettinger Public Schools received a grant through the NDCA Community Arts Access grant program. For more information about the North Dakota Council on the Arts and its programs that support communities across the state, call 701-328-7590 or visit its website at [www.nd.gov/arts](http://www.nd.gov/arts).